



The Insider

www.senate.mi.gov/switalski

Inside State Politics with State Senator Mickey Switalski Senate District 10

April 30, 2004

Welcome to the electronic version of *The Insider*. I would like to take the opportunity to thank you for your support and for giving me an opportunity to represent you in the Michigan Senate. It is my sincere hope that this bi-weekly e-newsletter will keep you informed of the happenings in Lansing, while keeping true to the traditional style of *The Insider*. If you would like to contact me, please feel free to e-mail me at senmswitalski@senate.michigan.gov or call me at my Roseville or Lansing office. You can also meet me in person during my constituent hours, coming to a library near you. Call my office and make an appointment, or you can just walk in. See page 4 for the schedule.

ACT on Merit (Exam)

Several of my Senate colleagues and I have recently introduced legislation that would switch the Michigan Educational Assessment Program (MEAP) test to the Michigan Merit Exam for high school students.

The Michigan Merit Exam would consist of the American College Test (ACT) and the Work Keys work readiness skills test that are currently used by colleges and employers to demonstrate proficiency. The exam would also include a social studies and writing component.

Considerable time is spent administering the MEAP, with the state giving up to 11 hours over two weeks to take the test. This comes at the expense of valuable classroom time that could be better used to teach our students. The Michigan Merit Exam would take less time to administer and would save schools money as a result.

Students have expressed their disdain for the MEAP. Many feel that there is little incentive to take the MEAP test seriously. The Merit Award scholarships were established as a way to improve this attitude but one can not escape the fact that the MEAP is not used by any colleges and universities in Michigan to determine admission.

Under federal No Child Left Behind legislation, 95 percent of the students must take the MEAP in order to meet the adequately yearly progress standard. Many Michigan high schools have failed to meet adequately yearly progress because not enough students took the test. This could lead to sanctions such as the loss of federal money to the school.

The switch from the MEAP to the ACT would not change the Michigan Merit Award scholarship program but would change the mechanism used to measure adequately yearly progress and to award the merit award scholarships.

The switch is also expected to save money to parents. A study by the Michigan Association of Secondary School Principals (MASSP) showed that up to 75 percent of high school students take the ACT and Michigan parents paid up to \$3 million out of their own pockets for their children to take the ACT. Under this legislation, the state would pay for the exam, which could lead to an increase in enrollment in colleges.

Hearings are currently being held in the Senate Education Committee on the feasibility and potential cost impact of the change. I will continue to keep you updated on the status of this legislation in future issues of the Insider electronic newsletter.

Racino Legislation Passes Senate

Legislation that would allow for the use of video gaming terminals in racetracks passed the Michigan Senate on April 29 on a 20-18 vote. The issue of whether to allow racinos was one of the more controversial pieces of legislation the Senate has worked on this session.

The House passed HB 4610 almost a year ago and the bill had languished in the Senate Gaming and Casino Oversight Committee until Tuesday. Senate Majority Leader Ken Sikkema (R-Wyoming), an opponent of the bill, surprised many by announcing that he would seek to discharge the bill out of committee.

I took a cautious approach to this bill. I weighed the feelings of my constituents, as well the potential pros and cons of the bill. After seeing the need to raise revenue for the state, I sought to make sure that the state got the better part of any deal on any racino legislation.

After almost three hours of discussion, debate and consideration of over 40 amendments, HB 4610 passed by a razor thin margin with the Senate making significant changes to the House version.

Among the changes includes more restrictions and regulations on racinos, a smaller payout to the racetracks, an increase of revenue from racino earnings that is earmarked to the state and increased funding for treatment of problem gamblers. The Senate-passed version also would not allow for off-track betting, Internet gambling or telephone wagering and would require a referendum in the county where a track is located to approve a racino.

Revenue estimates have varied, mostly based on the amount of terminals that are allowed to be used. The Senate version of HB 4610 would give the state about 70 percent of the revenues generated by allowing for racinos, while the House version allocated only about 40 percent.

The bill also tried to limit any potential economic effects on Native American-run casinos by including a provision that no racino could be located within 50 miles of any casino run by a tribe that paid a part of its profits to the state within the last three years.

Racinos, however, are still far from becoming a common occurrence. There are significant differences between the two versions of the bills that each chamber passed and it is expected that the legislation would go to a conference committee to hammer out a compromise.

Environmental Task Force

Memorial Day is just over a month away, and its arrival signals the unofficial start of summer.

Summer brings warmer weather and trips to the beach. For too many Macomb residents, beach closings have become the norm as our lakes and water streams are constantly registering above normal levels of bacteria.

Our drinking water also comes from water streams such as Lake St. Clair, which is known to have high levels of toxins. To address the issue of water quality, the Senate Democratic Party has created an Environmental Task Force with a theme of “Clean Water for our Children”.

I will be hosting one of the three public forums of the task force on June 3 at Metro Beach, located at 31300 Metropolitan Parkway in Harrison Township, from 7-9 p.m.

I will be discussing what elected officials such as myself at the state level can do to address water quality in this state as well as legislation that I am currently working on. The forum will also feature an opportunity for the public to interact by asking questions and providing testimony on issues that pertain to our environment.

The task force hearings are open to anyone who wishes to attend. I encourage anyone who is interested in protecting our water sources and providing clean water for our children to come to the forum.

Join the Fight Against Cancer

Cancer is an illness that affects everyone in some way. It may be someone you know, such as a loved one, a spouse, a sibling, a friend. Cancer can also be lethal as it is the second leading cause of death in the United States.

Sterling Heights Mayor Richard Notte and I are teaming up for a second consecutive year in the effort to raise money for the American Cancer Society in their battle against cancer.

Last year, Mayor Notte and I raised over \$5,000 at the annual Relay for Life walk-a-thon fundraiser. This year we hope to raise even more but we need your help.

The Relay for Life will take place on May 22 and May 23 at Chippewa Valley High School, located at 18300 19 Mile Road in Clinton Township. The event will begin at 10 a.m. on May 22 and will feature a 24-hour walk-a-thon with at least one member of each relay team staying on the track at all times.

If you would like to help, I will be collecting donations on behalf of the American Cancer Society in support of the “Relay for Life”. Checks can be mailed to: Relay for Life, c/o Senator Michael Switalski, 28311 Utica Road, Roseville, MI 48066.

Any help would be greatly appreciated. Together, we can make strides in the search for a cure to cancer.

Mickey's TV Insider Show

Check out my TV Insider Show coming to a television station near you. Watch me interview local guests about politics, life, issues and concerns to our district.

Sterling Heights

Every Saturday and Sunday at 12:30 p.m.
(Comcast Channel 5/WOW Channel 10)

Utica

Every Wednesday at 9 a.m.
(Comcast Channel 5/WOW Channel 10)

Clinton Township

Last week of every month- Sat thru Thurs
(Comcast Channel 5/WOW Channel 10)

Roseville

Every other Tuesday at 6:05 p.m.
(Comcast Channel 18)

*Please note that Sterling Heights/Utica/Clinton Township will show the TV Insider Show on Comcast Channel 5 and Wide Open West Channel 10. Clinton Township will air the TV Insider Show at various times during the last week of every month. Roseville can see the TV Insider Show on Comcast Channel 18.

Coffee Hours

*Please note that since the District Office is in Roseville, I do not have coffee hours in Roseville. I encourage you to visit the Roseville office. We even have a coffee pot.

Clinton Township

May 24
7-9 P.M.

Location: Clinton Township Public Library
(35891 Gratiot, north of 15 Mile)

Sterling Heights/Utica

May 3
7-9 P.M.

Location: Sterling Heights Library
(Utica and Dodge Park roads)

Contact My Office

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